

*Michael Berry has mastered critical skills to become successful.*

**M**ichael Scott Berry, ChFC, joined the financial-services industry 10 years ago by accident. In 1999, he sold his health club in Orange, Conn., and met a trusted friend and advisor, who had sold him life insurance. The advisor told Berry he would be successful in the financial-services business if he were to join it.

He did and the advisor was right. At 39, Berry, a NAIFA member, has achieved high levels of performance. He is a qualifying member of MDRT, has won several top honors within Northwestern Mutual and consistently earns high production numbers.

### Overcoming obstacles

Ten years ago, Berry joined Northwestern Mutual in Fairfield, Conn., where his friend and advisor also worked. He started by selling life insurance and, like every newcomer to the business, faced his set of challenges. "The challenges were about learning how to interact with your clients, learning about the products and the process," Berry recalls. He also had a wife and daughter to take care of. "It did not scare me all that much, but you are responsible for every penny that you earn." There were days when Berry almost quit, but picked himself up and started again. Luckily, he found tremendous support from the agents in his office.

Over the years, he honed his skills and found where his strengths lie. He realized the importance of factfinding and spends a lot of his time and energy on this process. "When I enter into a discovery interview, I am fully engaged in what the client has to say," he says. "I am listening to the client and if I don't understand a response, I will ask a question to clarify. I also listen for what I call 'missed opportunities' and try to understand the client's vision." A missed opportunity is when a client wishes he had made a different decision in the past, but did not, Berry explains. His factfinding meetings last from 30 minutes to three hours, and he sometimes meets with his prospects twice.

### Finding his market

Berry believes another reason behind his success is this simple philosophy: Once you can better understand and relate to yourself, you can better understand and relate to your clients. But to achieve this, you need to find a mentor who can help you discover yourself.

About two years ago, Berry says he recognized that, "I like to have fun, am responsible, I act courageously and am a gracious, grateful person." He then decided he would look for clients with similar traits. The result? He found his target market.



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Berry realized that the clients who fit this profile tend to be high-income Wall Street traders, portfolio managers, investment bankers, doctors and owners of closely held businesses. "I think I work with these types of people because of the match in the value proposition," he says. "They are looking for very sound long-term solutions. These clients also make quicker decisions and there aren't too many layers of red tape."

### Partnering with the best

Although Berry's core competency is life insurance and investments, he works with a team of specialists to offer his clients greater value and the best solutions. For instance, he works with a disability income insurance specialist if his client is seeking a solution in that area. "I don't think one person can be everything to everybody," Berry says. "If there is something that's beyond life insurance and investments that you feel someone else will be better able to handle within your company, you take their help."

While Berry has achieved great success, work-life balance is also important to him. "I never choose a business meet over my family," he says. Every Sunday, he and his wife decide on the parental duties for the week.

Berry plans to pursue \$1 million of premium credit per year by age 45. "Big producers in this industry have a very big perspective of their vision and every day, they work toward it," he says. "They are able to make decisions that are consistent with their vision and become successful because they live their vision." 

— Preeti Vasishtha